

the Latin; with a first *accessit* in history and geography.

He was then in his eighteenth year, and if prize-winning might be taken as a criterion, there was every likelihood that he would achieve a distinguished career.

But one must now go back a little, for other matters marked those school days at Aix. At first the boy boarded

at the college, then he became a half-boarder, and finally an *externe*, or day pupil, taking his meals at home; these

changes being necessitated by the gradually declining position of his family. Already while he was a

boarder, that is, barely in his teens, his literary bent began to assert itself, a

perusal of Michaud's "Histoire des Croisades" inspiring

him to write a romance of the middle ages, copiously pro-

vided with knights, Saracens, and fair damsels in distress.

That boyish effort, though the almost illegible manuscript

was preserved through life by its author, remained im-

printed; and a like fate attended a three-act comedy in

verse, entitled "Enfoncé le Pion," or "The Usher Outwitted."

However, given these literary leanings, and a fervent ad-

miration for some of the poets, as will presently be shown,

it may at first seem strange that on entering the third class

in 1856, and being called upon to choose between letters

and sciences, Zola, then over seventeen, should have selected

the latter. In this respect, as Paul Alexis says, he was influenced in part by the fact that, however proficient he might be in the dead languages, he had no real taste for them, whereas the natural sciences interested him; but his choice was also partially governed by the fact that he was the son of an engineer, and that a scientific career would be in accordance with his parentage. In his studies he was guided by one simple, self-imposed rule, a rule which, he